

Blind Rehabilitation Center

KGUN, a TV station in Tucson, AZ recently did a report on the Southwest Blind Rehabilitation Center, located at the VA facility in Tucson. The reporter interviewed Arnold Rice, a Vietnam Veteran who started losing his sight during his second tour in 'Nam. "When we're having our meals, it's amazing how many blind jokes fly around the dining room," Rice said. "I actually consider myself lucky, because I have some sight," Rice said. "There are many other folks that are here with me, that don't have their sight." Losing much of his vision and independence took a toll on Rice. He remembers one of the first questions he was asked when he started the program. "Do you have trouble putting toothpaste on your toothbrush," Rice recalls. "Now that's something we do every single day. You don't even think about it. And I said, 'Yeah, as a matter of fact, I do.'" This is one of the basic, everyday things that becomes challenging with vision loss. But here, they're taught how to do those everyday things a little differently. "And they said, 'Well, why don't you try squeezing a little toothpaste into your mouth and then brush your teeth?' Rice said. "And it's those kind of things that we learn here, that you don't even think about." Each veteran makes individualized goals at the center. For Rice, one of those goals was getting back into leather crafting. Other goals may include including cooking, personal financing, getting around neighborhoods.

The local Green Valley American Legion Riders chapter hosts a breakfast the last Saturday of each month for the Veterans currently in the rehabilitation program. The VA sends a couple buses of Veterans to Post 131 which Legion Rider volunteers make and serve breakfast. Sweetie and I were at the breakfast on the last Saturday in November and it was a wonderful event. Legion Rider volunteers not only served the breakfast, but also joined the tables of blind Veterans to talk about experiences and yes to even joke about blindness. I talked with some of the volunteers who told me how amazing the program Veterans were and how they are overcoming their handicap on their way to a more normal life.

We were invited to the breakfast as a recruitment effort by the Legion Riders. Since the weather here in southern Arizona is really good for motorcycle riding, we decided to buy a used bike. We found a 2009 Honda with low miles at a very reasonable price. We are now members of Post 131's Legion Riders. We are also still members of the FM Legion Riders. Of course, we've had rain for several days since we bought the bike which isn't ideal for riding. We have the bike registered and licensed in Minnesota. Our friend Diane from the Department of Motor Vehicles was extremely helpful in getting that done. We couldn't ask for better service, thanks Diane.